

## THE PUBLIC POLICY-MAKING PROCESS IN SINGAPORE

Jon S.T. Quah

### Introduction

The public policy approach began in the United States in the 1950s soon after the rejection of the politics-administration dichotomy by Paul Appleby, who contended that policy was inextricably linked with administration and it was therefore difficult, if not impossible, to separate them.<sup>1</sup> Since 1964 the study of public policy has become very popular and its growing importance is reflected in the establishment of schools and institutes of public policy in many American universities, the existence of a Policy Studies Organization, the increasing number of professional public policy journals, and the "explosion" in the public policy literature.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, according to Gerald E. Caiden, "Public policy making — the determination of the general direction of publicly resolved societal issues — is the most important area of public administration." However, the voluminous and expanding literature on public policy is culture-bound because the bulk of such research studies has been conducted in the United States and to a lesser extent in some Western European countries. Research on public policy in the developing countries has increased in recent years but is still scanty.<sup>4</sup>

The People's Action Party (PAP) government has formulated and implemented many public policies in Singapore since its assumption of office in June 1959. However, the research output on the formulation, implementation and evaluation of these policies has not kept in pace with the increase in the number of such policies. This is not surprising because the study of public policy in Singapore is still in its infancy. To date, public policy research in Singapore has focused on public housing, family planning, education, public transportation, family policy and health policy.<sup>5</sup> What is still lacking is an analysis of the public policy-making process in Singapore. This paper attempts to rectify this research gap by describing and evaluating the process of formulating and implementing public policies in Singapore.

In order to understand the public policy-making process in Singapore, we must first define public policy and identify those aspects of the local context which influence how public policies are formulated and implemented.

*Jon S.T. Quah is Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore.*

### Public Policy Defined

Definitions of public policy abound. On the one hand, there is the short and vague definition of public policy by Thomas R. Dye as "whatever governments choose to do or not to do."<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Austin Ranney's definition of public policy is characterized by five features and is perhaps the longest and most explicit definition.<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this paper, public policy is defined as a set of major guidelines which are directed toward the future and provide political leaders with a framework for making decisions in response to perceived societal problems and within the context of several constraints such as normative and resource constraints and uncertainty. There are several reasons for using this definition of public policy. First, policy is distinguished from decision because it provides a framework for decision-making. The second advantage of this definition is that it identifies the political leaders as the major policy actors as well as the constraints they are faced with in policy formulation. Finally, this definition identifies the purpose of public policy as the alleviation of those societal problems which are deemed to be important by the political leaders. This implies that those social problems not perceived to be problematic by the political leaders will not be placed on the policy agenda.

Having defined public policy, we can proceed to describe the policy context in Singapore.

### The Policy Context

The geographical, economic, demographic and political aspects of the Singapore environment constitute those factors which determine the nature and style of public policy formulation and implementation.

Geographically, the most relevant factor is Singapore's smallness. Singapore is essentially a city-state with a total land area of 618 square kilometres. More specifically, there is a main island and 57 islets. The bulk of the population live on the main island which is 41.8 kilometres long and 22.9 kilometres broad, and has a coastline of 131.5 kilometres. The rural sector is negligible since Singapore is highly urbanized and only 67.7 square kilometres (11 per cent) of the total land area are farm holding areas.<sup>8</sup>

The island's compactness and its high degree of urbanization have aided the policy-making process in various ways. Singapore's diminutiveness is advantageous for policy formulation and implementation since communication is seldom a problem and serves to facilitate political control by the leadership. A second advantage of smallness is that it enhances administrative coordination and integration and promotes responsiveness on the part of public officials.<sup>9</sup> Unlike the neighbouring countries of Malaysia and Indonesia, which are larger in size, Singapore's smallness has contributed to a highly centralized public

bureaucracy, which does not suffer from the same problems afflicting a federal public bureaucracy in its interaction with the state or provincial bureaucracies. Furthermore, the absence of a large rural sector not only reinforces the centralized nature of the public bureaucracy, but also implies that the latter is not burdened by problems arising from rural-urban migration or from rural development programmes because there is no need for such programmes in the first place.<sup>10</sup>

Economically, Singapore has developed rapidly after the launching of its industrialization programme and the establishment of the Economic Development Board (EDB) in August 1961. Its rapid economic growth during the last two decades has transformed the economy from a purely entrepot economy to an entrepot-manufacturing economy. Singapore's per capita gross national product has increased from S\$1,330 in 1960 to S\$13,783 in 1983.<sup>11</sup> This means that Singapore has the highest standard of living in Asia after Japan. The unemployment problem and housing shortage which plagued the city-state in the late 1950s have been solved as a result of the EDB's industrialization programme and the Housing and Development Board's efforts in providing low-cost public housing. Furthermore, health care services have been improved and this has resulted in increasing the life expectancy at birth for the average Singaporean from 63.6 to 71.4 years during the 1958-1980 period as well as a corresponding reduction in the infant mortality and child death rates. The increased government expenditure on education since 1960 has raised the literacy rate to 84.8 per cent, improved the educational level of the population and contributed to the growth of the mass media in Singapore.<sup>12</sup>

In short, the quality of life today in Singapore is much better than it was in the past. Singaporeans are now not only better educated and informed, but also enjoy a higher standard of living, better medical care and housing, little or no unemployment, and a longer life. This improvement in the quality of life means that Singaporeans have greater and new expectations which must be taken into account by the policy-makers.

The third facet of the policy context that is relevant for our discussion is the size and nature of its population. By the end of June 1982, the population was 2,471,800 and its density was 3,999 persons per square kilometre. Given the small size of Singapore, it is understandable that the PAP government has encouraged family planning among the population since 1966 to reduce the annual population growth rate.

A more important feature of the population is its heterogeneity. The population is multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-religious in nature. In terms of ethnicity, the population consists of 76.7 per cent Chinese, 14.7 per cent Malays, 6.4 per cent Indians (including those of Pakistani or Sri Lankan descent), and 2.2 per cent of other ethnic groups.<sup>13</sup> As far as language is concerned,

there are four official languages: English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil. Malay is the national language and English is the language of administration. There are also several Chinese dialects (Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hainanese, Hakka and Foochow) and Telegu, Malayalam, Punjabi, Hindi and Bengali are spoken by the ethnic Indians. Similarly, there is also great diversity in religion among the population. Taoists are the largest religious group (29.3 per cent), followed by Buddhists (26.7 per cent), Muslims (16.3 per cent) and Christians (10.3 per cent). 13.2 per cent of the population are atheists.<sup>14</sup>

The heterogeneous nature of the population imposes on the PAP government two important responsibilities in policy formulation and implementation. First, it has to ensure that the public bureaucracy is committed to the goal of nation-building by formulating and implementing policies that will enhance the integration of the various ethnic groups. The second obligation of the PAP government in a plural society is to ensure that both public and private organizations in Singapore are fair and impartial in their treatment of their clientele, regardless of their ethnic group, language or religion. There is thus no room for discrimination of any sort in these organizations in a plural society. Furthermore, there is a Presidential Council for Minority Rights which examines bills presented in parliament to ensure that the rights of the different minority groups in Singapore are not endangered.

The final and perhaps most important aspect of the policy context that must be considered is its political history. Singapore was a British colony for nearly 140 years and attained internal self-government peacefully in June 1959. This peaceful transfer of power is significant because it left intact the infrastructure developed by the British and spared the population from the bloodshed and turmoil that would have resulted from a violent transfer of power. Singapore's former colonial heritage means that it has political and administrative institutions patterned after the British prototype which influence the policy-making process. However, the British imprint on the policy-making process has been considerably reduced since 1959 with the emergence of the PAP government and its own style of policy-making.

The PAP won the 1959 general elections and formed the government. The party system was competitive, with the PAP as the dominant party in the legislature and the Singapore People's Alliance and the United Malays National Organization-Malayan Chinese Association Alliance as the two opposition parties. The same trend was apparent in the September 1963 general elections when the PAP captured 37 seats in the Legislative Assembly and the Barisan Sosialis became the opposition with 13 seats. However, in October 1966, the remaining Barisan Sosialis members of parliament boycotted parliament to discredit the ruling PAP government by demonstrating the absence of opposition in a parliamentary democracy. Thus, the competitive party system

was transformed into a *de facto* one party dominant system. The latter acquired *de jure* status when the PAP captured all the 58 parliamentary seats in the 1968 general elections. The PAP repeated its feat of winning all the parliamentary seats in the December 1972, December 1976 and December 1980 general elections. The PAP's monopoly of parliament was broken only when its candidate was defeated by the Worker's Party candidate in the October 1981 Anson by-election.

Thus, the most important feature of the political system in Singapore is the predominance of the PAP in the political arena after 1959 and the concomitant political stability and continuity during the past two and a half decades. The PAP's predominance in Singapore politics can be attributed mainly to its success in delivering the goods and services to the population and the resulting reservoir of legitimacy that it has accumulated during the last 25 years. Another reason for its success is its skilful use of the various grassroots organizations to counter the influence of the different pro-communist trade unions and political parties in the 1960s and to provide feedback on government policies in the 1970s and 1980s given the absence, until recently, of parliamentary opposition. Furthermore, the weaknesses of the other political parties in Singapore indicate the lack of a credible alternative to the PAP and has further reinforced the latter's predominance and durability.

The nature of the political culture in Singapore is perhaps another factor which has contributed to the PAP's predominance. David S. Gibbons has conducted research on the political attitudes of 209 Chinese farmers in Singapore. He has suggested the concept of the spectator political culture to describe the political attitudes of those farmers who are aware of the political system as a whole, its output and input objects, but who do not view themselves as active participants in the political process. Indeed, he found that one-third of the farmers interviewed were political spectators, that is, they were knowledgeable about Singapore politics but were not politically active.<sup>15</sup> Although Gibbons' research is based on a small sample of Chinese farmers, his concept of the spectator political culture is useful for describing the political attitudes of Singaporeans. Needless to say, whether most or all Singaporeans are political spectators is an empirical question to be answered by further research; but the reluctance of most Singaporeans to participate in politics and the difficulties encountered by the PAP in finding new candidates for political office suggest, perhaps, that there is some truth to the contention that Singapore has a spectator political culture.

The PAP's long term of uninterrupted rule for over 25 years has contributed to the effectiveness of the public bureaucracy and to a predictable style of policy-making. If there are frequent changes of government, the policy-making process becomes less predictable and the effectiveness of the public

bureaucracy can be undermined if its activities are disrupted and its departments re-organized. In sum, the PAP government's continuity and durability during the last 25 years is responsible for the public bureaucracy's high level of effectiveness and the highly predictable style of policy-making in Singapore.

In short, the policy context in Singapore in terms of its geography, economy, demography and political system, does not hinder the policy-making process. Instead, Singapore's small size, economic affluence, heterogeneous population, and political stability provide a conducive environment for the formulation and implementation of public policies.

### Policy Formulation

Policy formulation is the first stage of the policy-making process which "involves the development of pertinent and acceptable proposed courses of action for dealing with public problems."<sup>16</sup> More specifically, policy formulation consists of the following five steps: (1) the definition of the problem by the relevant policy-makers (usually the political leaders); (2) the identification of the causes of this problem; (3) the identification of the various alternatives for resolving this problem; (4) the selection of the most satisfactory alternative; and (5) the operationalization of the selected alternative in terms of a particular policy or set of policies. Research on policy formulation suffers from a serious limitation: inadequate data on the five steps mentioned above, especially the third step of identifying the different alternatives for solving the problem. Even if the problem has been clearly specified, it is not always possible to identify who the relevant policy-makers are, especially if they form part of the cabinet. Furthermore, we will not be able to know how the policy-makers analyze the causes of the problem or how they select the most satisfactory alternative (unless they inform us). In short, a shroud of secrecy usually surrounds this first stage of the policy-making process.

Bearing the above constraint of incomplete information in mind, we can now proceed to describe how public policies are formulated in Singapore on the basis of the available information. Most, if not all, of the public policies in Singapore are formulated by the cabinet, which is the supreme policy-making body of the government. According to Article 8(2) of the Constitution of Singapore, the cabinet has the general direction and control of the government and is collectively responsible to parliament.<sup>17</sup> Each minister has control and direction of a staff of civil servants in his ministry. There is a symbiotic relationship between a minister and his civil servants in policy formulation. The nature of this relationship has been spelt out in a government document as follows:

Ministers must be provided not only with information but also with

considered advice on which they formulate policies and make important decisions. Civil servants are thus expected to provide the basis upon which important decisions are made and implemented by the Government. They are also expected to implement the decisions of Ministers in the most efficient manner.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, when policies are formulated at the political level by a minister or by the cabinet as a whole, the role of the civil servants is to provide the necessary information, advice and past experience to the cabinet, which will then discuss and evaluate such information before recommending an appropriate policy. At present, the cabinet is made up of the Prime Minister, two Deputy Prime Ministers and twelve other ministers. In 1975, Kavin Wilairat identified Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Keng Swee, Toh Chin Chye and S. Rajaratnam, as the "inner circle" of the cabinet and the "inner clique" of the PAP.<sup>19</sup> One writer has described the roles of these four leaders in the policy-making process in the following way:

Mr. Lee ... is the prime mover — the man with the mind and personality of an advanced systems computer. He sets the pace for the PAP in anticipating today the problems of tomorrow, of next year, and of the next decade. Dr. Toh is the party technician who plays programmer to Mr. Lee's computer, translator to the cadres and the branches of the formulae which come grinding out, and signalman in keeping all channels clear. Dr. Goh is the whiz-kid who devises, supervises, and popularized the economic miracles which have produced, for instance, Singapore's instant industrialization. Mr. Rajaratnam is the thinker and theorizer, the man who takes the cosmic view of national and international problems and who has the time and inclination to elaborate them at great length in both speech and writing.<sup>20</sup>

However, today, the "inner circle" of the cabinet consists of Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Keng Swee and S. Rajaratnam. Since the December 1980 general election Toh Chin Chye has not been a member, and in 1981 he was replaced as Chairman of the PAP by Ong Teng Cheong, one of the second-generation leaders. Toh is now only a member of parliament and in recent years he has become disaffected with the PAP and has publicly criticized government policies both within and outside parliament.<sup>21</sup> Since Goh Keng Swee has indicated that he would not stand for office in the forthcoming general election, the membership of the "inner circle" of the cabinet could be extended to include one or two of the second-generation leaders.

As Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew is *primus inter pares* among his cabinet colleagues. However, in reality, he is the dominant figure in the "inner circle"

of the cabinet and his influence prevails in the formulation of public policies. Indeed, many of the public policies formulated in Singapore bear his imprint. For example, he was responsible for initiating the National Courtesy Campaign in June 1979 to improve courtesy among Singaporeans. In June 1980, he said that courtesy would improve the quality of social life in Singapore and that "by 1990, we can file down the rough ragged corners of our social behaviour which can grate on each other."<sup>22</sup> A more recent example of a public policy espoused by the Prime Minister was the priority given to graduate mothers for registering their children for Primary One classes in schools of their choice. In his National Day Rally Speech on August 14, 1984, Lee Kuan Yew identified the "problem" of the "lop-sided pattern of procreation" among graduate women who have fewer children than their non-graduate counterparts. If this pattern is not rectified, he suggested that Singapore would not be able to maintain its present standards.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, incentives have been provided for graduate women to have more children to maintain the talent pool on the one hand, and cash incentives have been given to non-graduate mothers to have fewer children on the other hand. A related policy is the setting up of the Social Development Unit to tackle the problem of the large number of graduate women who remain single.<sup>24</sup>

When policies are not formulated at the cabinet level (which is very rare), they can result from the initiative of the civil servants. In other words, the civil servants are responsible for identifying the problem and for suggesting how to deal with it. For example, officials from the Ministry of Home Affairs received feedback from doctors regarding cases of young persons who had developed signs of brain damage as a result of glue sniffing. The Ministry of Home Affairs was aware of the dangers of publicizing the problem of glue sniffing, but decided that, in the long run, it would be better if the members of the public were made aware of the problem.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, the Ministry of Home Affairs will be holding a national campaign against glue sniffing in February 1985. However, such instances of policy formulation by senior civil servants are few and constitute the exception rather than the rule. Indeed, the civil servants usually behave as "a trained apolitical body of professionals giving expert advice on, and carrying out the efficient implementation of, policy."<sup>26</sup>

Apart from the political leaders and senior civil servants, the various elite groups in Singapore participate in policy formulation in two ways. The first method is through their membership on statutory boards and advisory committees which provide technical information and assistance, "review and make recommendations regarding proposed policy and program changes, and suggest new measures for official consideration."<sup>27</sup> Since there are now 83 statutory boards in Singapore, this mode of influencing policy formulation is more direct and also perhaps more effective as members of such elite groups



who are members of statutory boards and advisory committees have ample opportunities to participate in discussions concerning alternatives for dealing with problems encountered by the statutory boards.

Secondly, the elite groups influence policy formulation through "their participation in chambers of commerce, trade associations, professional societies, and other organizations that represent aggregations of economic and social power."<sup>29</sup> The four chambers of commerce (International, Chinese, Indian and Malay), the Singapore Manufacturers' Association, and the Singapore Association of Bankers are among the most active business associations which have played and are continuing to play an important role in formulating those policies concerned with the economy.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, there are many professional organizations, but among the most prominent of these are the Singapore Medical Association, the Law Society of Singapore, the Singapore Institute of Architects, and the Institution of Engineers, Singapore. However, according to a local sociologist, the scope of these associations' influence and effectiveness in lobbying for "legislative changes, additions or omissions beneficial to their professions" has been restricted by government intervention.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, she further observes:

... notwithstanding government intervention, these associations are consulted by policy-makers from time to time, and asked for their views and suggestions on problems falling within their realm of expertise. It is through this consultancy that the associations have contributed to policy-making in Singapore.<sup>31</sup>

During the 1950s and early 1960s, trade unions were the most important pressure groups in Singapore which exerted influence on the incumbent government and political parties. The situation was radically changed in 1968 with the enactment of the Employment Act and the introduction of the concept of the tripartite alliance between the government, workers and employers in industrial relations for the purpose of improving the economy through the attraction of foreign capital and the provision of jobs.<sup>32</sup> These innovations had the desired effect of reducing the number of strikes and man-days lost.<sup>33</sup> In 1972, a tripartite body known as the National Wages Council (NWC) was formed to perform two functions:

(a) to advise the government on general wage guidelines and wage adjustments with a view to developing a coherent wage system consistent with long term economic and social development; (b) to advise on incentive systems for the promotion of efficiency and productivity in various enterprises.<sup>34</sup>

In short, although trade unions are well organized groups in Singapore today,

they are no longer pressure groups with the advent of the tripartite movement and the close ties between the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) and the PAP government. Indeed, the NTUC's Secretary-General is also the Minister without Portfolio, Ong Teng Cheong. Ong's presence in the cabinet will ensure that the views of the unions and workers will be taken into account in the formulation of labour policies.

Finally, do intellectuals play an important role in policy formulation in Singapore? According to a local political scientist, intellectuals in Singapore can (1) become intellectual-politicians, (2) legitimize the Established Order, (3) become Mandarins of the Established Order, and (4) remain as independent critics who influence public discussion and shape public opinion.<sup>35</sup> As the first three roles have already been discussed above in considering the role of the political leaders, elite groups and senior civil servants in policy formulation, it is only necessary for us to discuss the fourth role of intellectuals as independent critics. More specifically, the independent intellectuals can contribute to the formulation of public policies in four ways: (1) in the formulation of economic and cultural goals; (2) in increasing the political awareness of the population; (3) in serving as the "critic of power, the conscience of society, speaking for those without a voice against the dominant group"; and (4) in providing "an alternative source of ideas to be tapped."<sup>36</sup> Writing in 1977, Chan Heng Chee concluded:

In Singapore today the views of an independent intellectual receive no favour and if his views are critical of governmental power his function is not recognised as legitimate. Such an intellectual is vilified on the grounds that his claim to the right of criticism is an alien tradition borne of Western liberal thought; that new states need more power not less, more stability not instability.<sup>37</sup>

The above assessment remains quite accurate today as the PAP government is not very tolerant of independent critics. Indeed, the Minister without Portfolio, Ong Teng Cheong, recently described those who criticized government policies as "dissenters" and the Prime Minister referred to the same persons as "wiseacres".

In sum, it can be seen that the cabinet and especially the Prime Minister plays a predominant role in policy formulation in Singapore. Senior civil servants usually provide the necessary data and information for policy formulation, and are more concerned with policy implementation. Members of the elite groups participate in policy formulation directly through their membership of statutory boards and advisory committees, and indirectly through their participation in business and professional organizations. However, trade unions and independent intellectuals do not play an active role in the formulation of public policies in Singapore.

### Policy Implementation

Once a public policy has been formulated by the policy-makers, the stage is set for the second phase of the policy-making process, that is, policy implementation. According to two scholars, policy implementation refers to "those actions by public and private individuals (or groups) that are directed at the achievement of objectives set forth in prior policy decisions."<sup>36</sup> Thus, for the purposes of this paper, policy implementation is defined as those actions taken by public organizations and their members in order to attain the goals identified by the policy-makers during the policy formulation stage. More specifically, the activities involved in policy implementation are: (1) the identification of the implementing agencies and implementors; (2) the allocation of responsibilities and resources among the various implementing agencies; and (3) the monitoring of the activities of the implementing agencies and implementors.

One major reason why researchers have neglected the policy implementation phase until recently is the naive assumption on their part that "once a policy has been 'made' by a government, the policy will be implemented and the desired results of the policy will be near those expected by the policy-makers."<sup>38</sup> In reality, however, there is generally a poor record of policy implementation in the new states as policies which are formulated are seldom implemented. Over two decades ago, Albert O. Hirschman referred to the "failure-prone policy process" in the developing countries on the basis of his experiences in some Latin American countries.<sup>40</sup> More recently, Gerald E. Caiden has described implementation as the "achilles heel" of administrative reform and identified twelve reasons for the failure of implementation efforts in the Third World.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, three American scholars found that "many Third World governments must operate under administrative, economic and political constraints that virtually guarantee failure at the point where the policy is applied to the society."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, there are many obstacles to successful policy implementation in the new states viz., lack of qualified personnel, lack of political support for the implementors and implementing agencies, insufficient direction and control from political leaders, severe lack of funds available to meet the costs of implementing projects and programmes, resistance to the policy itself, corruption, and social indiscipline.<sup>43</sup>

However, compared to other new states, Singapore's experience in policy implementation is quite unusual as its public bureaucracy is "highly efficient in terms of policy implementation, that is, policies which are formulated are implemented without fail."<sup>44</sup> Singapore's flawless record in policy implementation can be attributed to the absence or non-applicability of the above obstacles to policy implementation in other developing countries in the Singapore context. Seven reasons can be provided to account for the good record of policy implementation in Singapore.

Perhaps the most important reason is the quality of the political leadership in Singapore. The ability of the PAP leaders to plan ahead and to anticipate problems as well as their willingness to enforce necessary but unpleasant measures, have all contributed to their ability to deliver the goods and their legitimacy in the political arena. Indeed, the PAP government has been in power for the last twenty-five years and has acquired a large reservoir of goodwill from the population because of its record in improving the living standards of Singaporeans. On the other hand, the various opposition parties in Singapore are weak and ineffective and have not been able to provide intelligent alternative proposals to controversial public policies or to point out the weaknesses of such policies. Consequently, there is little or no resistance on the part of the population to government policies.

Associated with the political leaders' ability to formulate realistic public policies is their commitment to and support for the formulated public policies. After the formulation of a public policy, the PAP government ensures its successful implementation by providing the necessary manpower, legislation, financial resources and equipment to the relevant implementing agencies. For example, the Housing and Development Board was able to implement its public housing programme successfully not only because of its effectiveness but also because of the PAP government's commitment and support as manifested in the provision of adequate manpower, funds and statutory powers for it to perform its functions.<sup>45</sup>

The third reason is that the various statutory boards and ministries involved in implementing public policies in Singapore are highly effective and staffed with qualified and competent personnel. Meritocracy is the order of the day in the Singaporean public bureaucracy as selection and promotion are based on achievement criteria and public officials are recruited or promoted on the basis of merit, relevant qualifications and experience rather than such ascriptive criteria as ethnic or kinship ties. For the Singapore Civil Service (SCS), the Public Service Commission (PSC) performs a gatekeeping function by ensuring that only suitably qualified candidates are appointed.<sup>46</sup> In the same way, promotions and the awarding of scholarships and training awards are based on merit. Furthermore, the PSC has been able to maintain a high level of discipline within the SCS by taking appropriate action against those civil servants found guilty of disciplinary offences. Discipline is not a serious problem at all in the SCS as there were 169 disciplinary cases in 1982, which constituted only 0.2 per cent of the 68,677 civil servants.<sup>47</sup>

Fourth, the low level of bureaucratic corruption is another important factor responsible for successful policy implementation in Singapore. Corruption constitutes a serious obstacle to policy implementation because scarce resources are squandered on bribes and not on the prescribed activities, and

delays are quite common and do not contribute to the swift implementation of public policies. Corruption is no longer a way of life in Singapore because of the effectiveness of the PAP government's anti-corruption strategy which takes the form of minimizing the need for corruption by constantly improving the salaries and working conditions of the public bureaucracy, and reducing the opportunities for corruption through the Prevention of Corruption Act and the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau.<sup>48</sup>

The fifth factor accounting for the successful record in policy implementation in Singapore is the PAP government's reliance on periodic national campaigns as an instrument of policy implementation as well as an agent for changing the attitudes and behaviour of Singaporeans. In Singapore, national campaigns refer to "those government led and inspired movements which have an organised and formal course of action, used with the intent of influencing and arousing public awareness while at the same time engaging the people to behave in certain desired ways."<sup>49</sup> So far, a total of 78 national campaigns has been held in Singapore from 1958-1984.<sup>50</sup> Each national campaign usually has three stages: (1) the identification by the political leaders of a social problem which requires corrective action, and their decision to rectify this problem by increasing public awareness through the launching of a nation-wide campaign; (2) the inauguration of the national campaign by a minister, who also explains the rationale for the campaign; and (3) the enforcement activities taken by the authorities to ensure compliance with the corrective measures suggested by the political leaders. In short, the PAP government has relied on national campaigns to persuade the people to support its policies on the one hand, and disincentives have also been introduced to ensure compliance with such policies on the other hand.

Related to the above factor of national campaigns is the social discipline of the population. Social discipline is "the compliance with guidelines of behaviour (that is, policies) established by democratically elected decision-makers and designed to attain national goals." Furthermore, such compliance also "implies the acceptance and upholding of the principles of self-restraint in favour of the common good whenever the implementation of means to attain national goals requires it."<sup>51</sup> Stella R. Quah has argued that social discipline (as defined above) in Singapore has helped the PAP government to solve the problems of housing and population growth and as such, provides an alternative way of resolving social problems.<sup>52</sup> In other words, the population in Singapore is quite disciplined and has cooperated with and supported the PAP government's policies on public housing and family planning among others.

Last but not least, the small size of Singapore is conducive to successful policy implementation since the public bureaucracy is not plagued by the logistical and communications problems encountered in much larger countries.

Since Singapore's size is equivalent to that of Chicago or Lake Taupo in North Island, New Zealand, the usual obstacles to implementing public policies which result from the vastness of the country concerned are not applicable in Singapore. It takes about two hours or more to cover the island by road and there is a good network of roads to ensure that this is possible. In a large country like Indonesia, it might take several days or even weeks for government officials to travel to the provinces to monitor the progress of implementation efforts. In sum, Singapore's smallness is an asset for policy implementation since it enhances rather than hinders the implementation of public policies.

### **Policy Evaluation**

*This is the final phase of the policy-making process and occurs after the relevant policy has been formulated and implemented. Policy evaluation is not an easy task to perform as there are many problems confronting policy evaluation studies.<sup>53</sup> For our purposes, policy evaluation refers to "the production of information about the value or worth of policy outcomes."<sup>54</sup> There are two types of policy evaluation: process evaluation and impact evaluation. Process evaluation focuses on whether the policy has been implemented according to its stated guidelines. In impact evaluation, on the other hand, the concern is with gauging the extent to which a policy has effected change in the desired direction. Comprehensive evaluation studies usually include both process and impact evaluation.<sup>55</sup>*

When the PAP government was elected to public office in June 1959, it encountered two serious problems: a critical housing shortage and a very high unemployment rate. Accordingly, it tackled these problems by embarking on a comprehensive public housing programme and initiating an industrialization programme. At that time, the PAP government's main concern was to solve these problems in order to fulfill their electoral promises and to ensure its political survival. There was thus no time nor need to consider the consequences of these policies during the early 1960s. The only concern then was to build enough low cost public housing units to meet the annual increase in population and to provide enough jobs for the school leavers and university graduates.

The situation today is, however, quite different. Singapore is now celebrating 25 years of nation-building (1959-1984) and is indeed a "going" concern, a success story that is envied by many other developing countries. The public housing programme, which caters to more than 75 per cent of the population, is legendary. Similarly, Singapore's annual population growth rate has been reduced considerably through the splendid efforts of the Singapore Family Planning and Population Board.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the rapid economic

growth achieved by Singapore during the last 25 years has been made possible through the creation of statutory boards after 1959 to speed up the developmental process.<sup>57</sup>

What are the effects of the PAP government's policies of public housing, family planning, education, industrialization and public transportation on the population in Singapore? Has the concentration of people in the public housing estates exacerbated the problems of crime, vandalism and suicide? Has the proliferation of HDB flats led to the erosion of the extended family in Singapore? What are the implications of the two child family norm for non-graduate mothers on the one hand, and the official encouragement of graduate mothers to have more children on the other hand? What is the effect of bilingualism on the performance of school children? What are the short and long term consequences of streaming students at the Primary Three level? What are the causes of drug addiction, glue sniffing and juvenile delinquency among Singapore youths? What are the causes of "killer litter"? These are some of the questions which need to be answered, but unfortunately, very little research has so far been focused on these issues. Indeed, a great deal of empirical research needs to be done on the above-mentioned topics.

Hence, it is not surprising that existing studies focus more on the formulation and implementation of public policies in Singapore instead of on the evaluation of such policies. Apart from the inherent difficulties involved in policy evaluation, the neglect of policy evaluation by Singapore scholars can also be attributed to the fact that until recently, the PAP government was not very concerned with evaluating the effects of their policies. During their first two decades in power, the PAP leaders were concerned with formulating and implementing realistic policies to ensure a better quality of life for Singaporeans. It is only during the last few years that they have begun to take stock of the situation and to assess the consequences of the various policies initiated.

The PAP government has realized in recent years that social scientists are increasingly needed to perform the following tasks: (1) to collect the relevant empirical data for analysing social problems; (2) to analyse the causes of social problems on the basis of the data collected; and (3) to suggest recommendations for alleviating if not solving the social problems facing Singapore as a result of its rapid economic development during the last 25 years. Another manifestation of this change in attitude is the mushrooming of research and statistics departments in the various ministries and statutory boards. Moreover, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew has increasingly relied on and quoted statistical data in his major policy speeches in recent years.<sup>58</sup> For example, he has referred to survey findings in his inaugural speeches for the courtesy, "Speak Mandarin" and productivity campaigns recently.

In short, policy evaluation as an activity and as an area of inquiry is still

In its infancy in Singapore. Having successfully formulated and implemented so many public policies during the last 25 years, the time is now ripe for the PAP government to embark seriously on an evaluation of its major, if not all its, policies. In this connection, it is heartening to note that the Singapore Police Force has perhaps shown the way for other government agencies by including an evaluation by external consultants of its Neighbourhood Police Post (NPP) project. The NPP project was initiated in June 1983 with the introduction of NPPs in eight electoral constituencies which make up the police "B" Division. From March to May 1983, a pre-test was conducted in the form of a survey of the residents' attitudes towards the police before the introduction of the NPPs. The post-test was conducted from March to May 1984 to find out whether the NPPs had any impact on the residents' attitudes towards the police.<sup>59</sup>

In the near future, it is hoped that more government agencies in Singapore will become aware of the need for policy evaluation and to make provisions for such an activity as part of the overall assessment of their effectiveness in meeting their stated goals. In the same way, it is also hoped that scholars interested in public policy will also devote their energies to the evaluation of existing public policies in Singapore.

### Conclusion

In this paper we have described the public policy-making process in Singapore in terms of the policy context, policy formulation, policy implementation and policy evaluation. The policy context has been quite conducive for the formulation and implementation of public policies in Singapore. Although not much is known about the policy formulation phase in Singapore, it is nevertheless quite clear that the Prime Minister plays a predominant role in the formulation of public policies. The public bureaucracy is highly efficient in policy implementation for the reasons discussed above; but it is still deficient as far as policy evaluation is concerned. It is to be hoped that this neglect will be rectified in the near future.

In closing, it might perhaps be appropriate to highlight briefly three features which make the style of public policy-making in Singapore unique. First, the style of public policy-making in Singapore is elitist, with the Prime Minister and his cabinet colleagues playing pre-eminent roles. Second, they have also relied on national campaigns to change the attitudes and behaviour of Singaporeans and to serve as an instrument of policy implementation. Finally, the reliance on policy diffusion, that is, the learning from the experiences of other countries in policy-making, is another hallmark of the PAP leaders' style of policy-making. However, these leaders should remember that the Singapore of today (1984) is quite different from that of 1959. The population is now better educated, better informed and has higher expectations. The old style of not



## ASIAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

explaining policies or not consulting those that will be affected by proposed policies is no longer relevant today. The PAP leaders should strive to obtain more feedback and to consult the population more before formulating and implementing public policies. Indeed, more consultation and less imposition of policies should be practised by the second generation leaders in the public policy-making process in Singapore.

### NOTES

- 1 Paul Appleby, *Policy and Administration* (Alabama University of Alabama Press, 1949)
- 2 Jon S T Quah, "Public Administration An Introduction to the Discipline for Students in the ASEAN Countries" (Singapore Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore, Occasional Paper No 41, 1981), pp 7 and 13-14
- 3 Gerald E Carden, *Public Administration*, 2nd ed (Pacific Palisades Palisades Publishers, 1982), p 51
- 4 See for example, Menlee S Grindle (ed), *Politics and Policy Implementation in the Third World* (Princeton Princeton University Press, 1980)
- 5 See Jon S T Quah, "Political Science in Singapore" in Basant Kapur (ed), *Singapore Studies Survey of the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Singapore Singapore University Press, in press), fns 258-262 for the details
- 6 Thomas R Dye, *Understanding Public Policy*, 2nd ed (Englewood Cliffs Prentice-Hall, 1975), p 1
- 7 Austin Ranney, "The Study of Policy Content A Framework for Choice" in Austin Ranney (ed), *Political Science and Public Policy* (Chicago Markham Publishing Company, 1968), p 7
- 8 *Singapore Facts and Pictures 1983* (Singapore Information Division, Ministry of Culture, 1983), pp 1-2
- 9 Jacques Rapoport, Ernest Murteba, and Joseph J Theratit, *Small States and Territories Status and Problems* (New York United Nations Institute for Training and Research, 1971), pp 148-149
- 10 Jon S T Quah, "Public Administration in a City-State The Singapore Case" in Keiso Hanaoka (ed), *Comparative Study on the Local Public Administration in Asian and Pacific Countries* (Tokyo EROPA Local Government Center, 1984), p 213
- 11 Republic of Singapore, *Economic Survey of Singapore 1983* (Singapore Ministry of Trade and Industry, 1984), p viii The exchange rate for the U S dollar for the same period has decreased from S\$3 00 to S\$2 11
- 12 *Singapore 1983* (Singapore Information Division, Ministry of Culture, 1983), p 4
- 13 *Singapore Facts and Pictures 1983*, p 4
- 14 *Ibid*, p 5, and Khoo Chian Kim, *Census of Population 1980* (Singapore Department of Statistics, 1981), Release No 9, Religion and Fertility, p 31, Table 2
- 15 David S Gibbons, "The Spectator Political Culture A Refinement of the Almond and Verba Model," *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies* 9 (March 1971) 29-32
- 16 James E Anderson, *Public Policy-Making*, 2nd ed (New York Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), p 63
- 17 S Jayakumar, *Constitutional Law (with documentary materials)* (Singapore Malaya Law Review, Faculty of Law, University of Singapore, 1976), p 67
- 18 Republic of Singapore, *Instruction Manual No 4 Office Management* (Singapore Ministry of Finance, 1972), "Government Organization and Procedures," para A1
- 19 Kawin Wilarat, "Singapore's Foreign Policy A Study of the Foreign Policy System of a City-State" (Ph D dissertation, Georgetown University, 1975), p 220